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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 26, 2007

Asylum Court Will Come in 2008

¶1. Contrary to the recommendations of a SPOe/OeVP expert group, there will be a separate asylum court - Vice Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer has announced that a respective decision will be made this year and that the new institution will begin its work in the first half of 2008. The intention is to reduce the number of cases that are currently pending.

It was Minister of the Interior G|nther Platter who had originally pressed for the establishment of a separate court to deal with asylum cases, while the expert commission wanted to delegate the asylum cases to the Federal Administrative Court. The solution which is now favored by the government takes into consideration the possibility that it will be some time before comprehensive reforms in the judicial sector, which will include the Administrative Court, will be completed. Centrist daily "Die Presse" quotes the Vice-Chancellor as saying that he did not want to wait that long. At the moment, it often takes years until asylum cases can be resolved and the Administrative Court is often bogged down with cases. There is still the possibility that the newly-created court for asylum cases will become part of the Administrative Court once the reform of federal institutions has come into effect, writes the daily.

Salsa Instead of Ketchup

¶2. Following an invitation of the US and Australian Embassies, Rachel Friedberg, researcher at the University of Providence/Rhode Island [sic; actually, Brown University] in the areas of job markets and immigration, spoke at a symposium about "Migration in the 21st Century" in Vienna. Friedberg explained how immigration of various ethnic groups has changed the "face" of the US, but stressed that the cultural changes did not irritate Americans as much as they did Europeans, since the US is a classic immigration country. Friedberg also made a case for a joint European immigration policy. [Der Standard, p. 5]

According to Friedberg, any comparison of the "Blue Card," the planned EU immigration card, with the US Green Card is difficult because of the important issue of who gets access: "Will selection take place on the grounds of education, family, abilities or asylum applications?" Friedberg explained in independent daily "Der Standard" that most immigration in the US takes place through family reunion, but it is controversial whether this is a sensible approach. In this connection, she referred to Canada, which tends to select more according to educational status. It is particularly the illegal immigration from Latin America that has had a strong impact on the development of US society, Friedberg states, citing as examples the strengthening of Catholicism and the strong conservative tendencies with regard to social issues. All in all,

Friedberg holds that, economically speaking, immigration is valuable for society. The immigrants do not take away anybody's jobs, but in the end set up businesses of their own and thus create new jobs, argues the scientist, adding that there is also the pension factor to be considered: In a society with a low birth rate, such as Austria, someone will have to pay the pensions for the citizens in the long run."

OMV Pushes for MOL Takeover

¶3. The Austrian energy supplier OMV has made a generous bid for taking over the Hungarian MOL. Since the management of MOL has so far refused to engage in negotiations and sees the Austrian bid as an attempt at a "hostile takeover," the OMV is now trying to tempt the shareholders with a good offer - it is prepared to pay about 128 euros per share, which is 20 percent more than the current stock price, to bring about the alliance with MOL. The overall costs would be about 11 billion euros. [Neue Kronenzeitung, p. 5; other Austrian media]

The OMV is hoping that the MOL shareholders will exert pressure on the management, writes mass circulation tabloid "Neue Kronenzeitung." To make it possible for the OMV to present an official offer, the current limitation of the voting right for each shareholder, which is currently at 10 percent, would have to be abolished. The EU Commission is already investigating whether this is compatible with the laws. Also, the Hungarian government would have to give up its attempts to block the takeover of the MOL by the OM using new judicial means. According to the tabloid, the Hungarians fear that a fusion would kill jobs. Economic daily "Wirtschaftsblatt" points out that the small investors in Hungary favor the OMV takeover and are angry with MOL for rejecting it. Analysts see little chances for the OMV offer as long as the Hungarian government does not change its mind, writes the daily.

Bush Wants Mission of Freedom for UN

¶4. At his address to the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, Bush reminded the UN of its fundamental duty, which is to bring freedom and democracy to the world. He urged the UN to begin a "mission of freedom" - "freedom from tyranny, disease, analphabetism and poverty." Bush used the current situation in Burma to push for measures against repressive regimes. [Die Presse, p. 7; other Austrian media]

With regard to the reform of the UN Security Council, Bush argued in favor of enlargement, pointing out that Japan is very well positioned to become a permanent member state. The US President only had one sentence to spare for Iran - that might have been different had there not been the American disaster in Iraq, speculates centrist daily "Die Presse." The daily also refers to the role assumed by one of the formerly sharpest critics of the US administration, France, which has taken it upon itself to act as "warning voice" with regard to Iran. President Nicolas Sarkozy has warned the other nations: "If we allow Iran to get its hands on nuclear weapons, we would incur an unacceptable risk for the stability of the region and the world." Sarkozy reiterated once again the French position which includes a ban on nuclear weapons for Iran, an arsenal of sanctions, and negotiations. France is even considering imposing bilateral economic sanctions if there will be no third Security Council resolution. Sarkozy also pointed out that Iran had the right to peaceful use of nuclear weapons, reports the daily.

Ahmadinejad Declares End of Nuclear Conflict

¶5. In his speech before the UN General Assembly, the Iranian President announced his intention to place his country's controversial nuclear program under IAEA surveillance while at the same time refusing to yield in the conflict about the sanctions that the UN Security Council has imposed on Iran. Ahmadinejad stressed that it is the IAEA's task to "monitor the nuclear activities of its member states" without pressure from the US or other countries. He likewise pointed out that Iran was prepared to conduct constructive talks with all parties, as it had done in the past. [ORF online]

Military Threatens to Use Violence

¶6. In Burma, the political situation is heating up ever more as the military junta has stepped up its efforts to stifle the protest

movement. Aside from threats and warnings, it has now taken its first concrete steps to reassert its power: It has imposed a curfew on the cities of Rangoon and Mandelay and has banned gatherings of more than five people. In the meantime, Western heads of government have called for further sanctions against the regime. US President Bush has already announced sanctions, among others banning members of the junta from entry to the US. [Salzburger Nachrichten, p. 9; other Austrian media]

With regard to the international efforts to punish the repressive regime in Burma, China's role is problematic. Independent daily "Salzburger Nachrichten" points out that the country has been blocking all attempts to put one of the last remaining totalitarian states on the UN agenda. This makes any action on the part of the Security Council difficult. Centrist daily "Die Presse" lists some of the reasons why the Chinese are interested in not letting the situation in the neighboring country get out of hand: Burma has what China urgently needs: natural resources, wood, oil and gas as well as strategically important access to the Gulf of Bengal. Also, at least a million Chinese live in Burma, having illegally migrated to the country since the nineties. Especially in the north of the multi-ethnic state, trade is in the meantime in Chinese hands and the ensuing competition leads to tensions with the local population - a further reason for Beijing to fear unrest in Burma. At the same time, China remains the most important weapons supplier for the junta.

McCaw